

Fire Safety

LEARN THE ABCs OF FIRE EXTINGUISHERS

There are four major kinds of extinguishers, each designed to put out different kinds of fires. It's important to use the right one for the job.

Type A extinguishers put out fires involving ordinary combustibles such as wood, cloth, paper, rubber and some plastics. This is the most common type of fire. These extinguishers usually contain pressurized water.

Type B extinguishers are meant to fight fires involving flammable liquids such as gasoline, oil, grease, tar, oil-based paint, lacquer or flammable gas. This is the second most frequent kind of fire. Like Type C, these extinguishers often hold carbon dioxide or dry chemicals.

Type C extinguishers will put out fires involving electrical equipment including wiring, fuse boxes, circuit breakers, machinery and appliances.

Type D extinguishers are made to fight fires that occur in certain industrial settings and involve combustible metals such as magnesium and sodium. Only qualified firefighters should attempt to put these out.

Some fire extinguishers put out more than one kind of fire and are labeled that way. An ABC extinguisher, for example, will put out most fires.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

The first thing to do when you notice a fire is to sound the alarm and call the fire department. If you do not feel that you can safely handle a fire, leave immediately, and take everyone else out of the building with you. Close the doors behind you to slow the spread of flames. Stay between the fire and an exit so you don't let the fire block your escape.

SEVEN STRATEGIES TO PREVENT FIRES

1 Practice good worksite housekeeping habits. Do not let trash and waste material accumulate. Empty trash bins regularly. Oily rags must be stored and disposed of in covered metal containers, according to company policy.

2 Do not store materials or allow clutter to accumulate around exits and stairways. Fire doors should be kept closed as directed. Fire exits should always remain free and accessible.

3 A common cause of workplace fires is machinery or equipment that becomes overheated. Be sure to follow operating guidelines to prevent overloading. Follow manufacturer's instructions in using and maintaining equipment.

4 Electrical malfunctions are also a major contributor to fires in the workplace. Electrical equipment should be checked regularly for signs of trouble, such as damaged cords or worn insulation. Never overload circuits and never force circuit breakers to remain in the "on" position. Only qualified and authorized personnel should carry out electrical repairs and maintenance, but everyone is responsible for being alert to the signs of electrical malfunction.

5 It is important to understand the fire hazards of the materials with which you work. They may be combustible, flammable, explosive or reactive. Read the labels and know where to locate the material safety data sheet (MSDS) for further information. Carefully follow any instructions when you are using any materials that might pose hazards.

6 Be sure to observe any smoking restrictions. Smoke only in designated areas. Smoking in unauthorized areas such as storage rooms has resulted in serious fires. Do not empty ashtrays until smoking materials are cold.

7 Observe company security policies and be alert to any suspicious persons or activities. Many workplace fires are set by arsonists, so do your part to prevent these incidents.



P.A.S.S. THE FIRE EXTINGUISHER

PULL. Pull the pin. On some extinguishers, you may have to release a latch or press a lever.

AIM. Aim the nozzle of the extinguisher at the base of the fire.

SQUEEZE. Squeeze or press the handle. Or, you may have to press a button. This discharges the extinguishing agent.

SWEEP. Sweep the extinguisher from side to side, aiming at the base of the fire until the flames appear to be out. Repeat the procedure if the fire reappears.

FACT or FICTION?

FICTION: You should always try to fight a fire with an extinguisher.

FACT: You should only use an extinguisher if you know how to use it and the fire is small. Otherwise, you should leave the job to the experts. Don't turn your back on the fire once you think it is out, because it could flare up again. Also, avoid breathing the smoke, fumes or extinguishing agent. Take care of your portable extinguisher and recharge it after each use. It should be regularly serviced and inspected. You can aid in putting out small fires by knowing where a fire extinguisher is and how to use it. However, if you have any doubts about the procedure or the fire is too big, exit the building and leave the rest to the fire department.